



Extension News Column

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To: Mary Beth Smetzer, community news editor, News-Miner, 459-7546 (wk), 452-7917 (fax), msmetzer@newsminer.com, and people@newsminer.com
From: Roxie Dinstel
Re: Pinching Pennies to run Mondays on page A-3
Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

Thanksgiving is right around the corner. For those of us hosting the dinner, you know what a hole it can put in your food budget. Let's look at ways you can cut that bill down to size and still enjoy a festive occasion.

Share the fun and ask guests to contribute to the meal. Suggest that guests contribute a side dish, bread, dessert or beverages for the special meal and save money on food costs. Chances are, people will be more than happy to contribute some holiday meal goodies. Be sure to ask guests what they'll prepare so you won't end up with four green bean casseroles.

Check out the circulars from grocery stores. Browse and compare prices to find the best deals. Grocers tend to pick different items to put on special, so you could find a great deal on baking essentials at one store and a better deal for side dishes at another. One store here in town often gives a turkey away if you spend a certain amount of money. Another puts other items on sale. Check the circulars to find the best deals.

It's a basic marketing strategy — grocers offer a very low price on one item in hopes you will come in for that item and then end up buying all your groceries there. Just don't waste the savings on gas! Do your research before you drive.

Now that we are talking about that free turkey, get as big a bird as possible. Ounce for ounce, the bigger turkeys are cheaper. If a 25-pound turkey for only a few guests sounds like too many leftovers, plan for leftovers to use in other meals. I always buy a big bird and after the meal, slice it and put it in the freezer in meal-sized portions. It's a ready-made meal handy to use at a later date.

One of those other premade things you may be tempted to buy is a dessert. No doubt, the price they offer in our stores on basic pumpkin pies is dirt cheap. That's another way to get you in the store. But if you match that pumpkin pie with a cheesecake, you'll pay big time. So, take the opportunity this year to bake it yourself. If you are a novice, buy premade crusts and pie filling. I priced a cherry pie this week at the store at \$12, but the pie filling and crust cost only \$7.50.

Don't get too carried away with the side dishes. Why make so many side dishes when you know there are always leftovers? Remember, the turkey tends to be the center of the meal and most people only have small portions of the sides. Two to three sides of veggies or casseroles should be more than enough.

Try to gather as many coupons as possible. In addition to looking for coupons printed in newspapers or flyers, look online. There are a lot of coupons that you can download, including some that you can store right in your cell phone that can be used at the register.

Keep it simple. I know how tempting it is to make complicated meals with expensive ingredients to give your guests the ultimate Thanksgiving dinner. But doing this adds money, time and stress to your holiday. Why not keep things simple and enjoy the meal yourself?

If you want to really mix things up this year, why not volunteer for Thanksgiving? Here in Fairbanks, we have dinners at the Fairbanks Rescue Mission, Alano Club, Immaculate Conception Church and American Legion. Volunteers are needed to help out on this important day. Be sure to call ahead to each location to see where your help is needed. Not only would you skip all the buying, cooking and cleaning, but you'd get to help others and be reminded how truly blessed your life is.

Volunteering together with friends and family is also a great way to be with them while celebrating this day of thanks.

Whatever form your Thanksgiving dinner takes, be sure to remember to give thanks for all the bounty in your life.

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